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The Turkish Expedition to Astrakhan' in 1569 and the Problem of the Don-Volga Canal

A. N. KURAT

I

THE Turkish expedition to Astrakhan' in 1569, which was linked with the idea of a canal between the Don and the Volga, was the first of a long series of conflicts between the Ottoman empire and Russia. Turkish and Russian history text-books differ in their interpretation of the purposes of the expedition: Turkish historians are inclined to lay stress on the contemplated Don-Volga canal, while Russian historians, particularly in recent years, have treated it as Turkish aggression against Russia. A few Turkish and Russian historians have made a special study of the expedition and written about it in some detail. The first of them was Professor Ahmed Refik who published an article in Turkish in 1917 under the title 'The Caspian-Black Sea Canal and the Astrakhan' Campaign'.¹ This was followed in 1946 by Professor N. A. Smirnov's two-volume work entitled 'Russia and Turkey in the 16th and 17th Centuries' which devoted a chapter to the Astrakhan' expedition under the heading 'The Russo-Turkish War of 1569'.² In 1947 another Soviet historian, P. A. Sadikov, discussed the expedition in an article in Russian entitled 'The Campaign of the Tartars and Turks against Astrakhan' in 1569'.³ The same year a Turkish scholar, Halil Inalcdjik also published an article in English on 'The Origin of the Ottoman-Russian Rivalry and the Don-Volga Canal (1569)'. It appeared in a Turkish version in 1948.⁴

Professor Refik's article simply reproduces the accounts of the expedition given in the Turkish chronicles and makes no attempt to examine them critically in the light of other sources. Professor Inalcdjik also uses Turkish sources in the main, supplemented by material drawn from other authorities, including Russian historians such as Karamzin and Solov'yov. He sets the Astrakhan' expedition against the general background of what he believes to have been an active Ottoman policy in

¹ A. Refik, 'Bahr-i Hazer-Karadeniz kanalı ve Ejderhan seferi' (*Tarih-i Osmani Ecümeni Mecmuası*, no. 43, 1917, Istanbul, pp. 1-14).

² N. A. Smirnov, *Rossiya i Turtsiya v XVI-XVII vv.*, 2 vols., Moscow, 1946, I, pp. 100-59.

³ P. A. Sadikov, 'Pokhod tatar i turok na Astrakhan' v 1569 g.' (*Istoricheskiye zapiski*, no. 22, Moscow, 1947, pp. 132-66).

⁴ H. Inalcik, 'The Origin of the Ottoman-Russian Rivalry and the Don-Volga Canal (1569)' (*Annales de l'Université d'Ankara*, I, 1946-47, Ankara, 1947, pp. 47-110). The Turkish version appeared in *Belleten*, no. 46, Ankara, 1948, pp. 342-402.

the area north of the Black Sea and stresses the importance of the Don-Volga canal as an element in this policy. He also accepts, with only slight amendments, the assertion in the Turkish chronicles that 'a third of the distance between the Don and the Volga was dug during the three months when the Turkish forces were present in the area'.⁵ Professor Smirnov relies for the most part on material from the Russian archives such as the reports of Novosil'tsev, the Muscovite envoy to Turkey in 1570, and of Mal'tsev, a Muscovite envoy to the Nogais in 1568, who fell into captivity and accompanied the Astrakhan' expedition as a Turkish prisoner. He also draws on an account of the campaign written by an anonymous author whom he considers to have been a Ukrainian Cossack accompanying the Turkish forces. This account was copied for Prince Golitsyn in 1677 and was published by the Odessa archaeological and historical society in 1872. Like Inaldjik, Smirnov tries to see the Astrakhan' expedition within the wider context of Russo-Turkish relations during the 16th century. He affirms that the sultan's aim was to keep Muscovite Russia encircled by Turkish vassals, and that the Astrakhan' expedition was intended to dislodge the Russians from the Volga delta by armed force. His description of the expedition makes reference to various armed clashes between the Turks and Russian forces under Prince Serebryany.⁶ But in this as in certain other details it is plainly in error. Sadikov relies in general on the same sources as Smirnov, and he prints Mal'tsev's reports and an extract from the reports of Novosil'tsev in an appendix to his article. He also suggests that the author of the account of the Astrakhan' campaign published by the Odessa archaeological and historical society was not an anonymous Ukrainian Cossack, as Smirnov supposed, but a Polish-Lithuanian nobleman called Andrzej Taranowski who served as a Polish envoy and was an eye-witness of the final stages of the expedition.⁷

Taranowski's account of the expedition exists in other forms than that published in Odessa in 1872. On his return to Warsaw after the expedition ended he compiled a report for King Sigismund Augustus II on 24 December 1569. Soon afterwards it was translated into German, and a copy was sent to the Holy Roman Emperor. Another copy went to a Nuremberg printer called Dietrich Gerlitz who published it as a pamphlet of 25 pages in 1571.⁸ Any historian researching into the

⁵ Peçevi, *Tarihi*, I, 469; Ali, 'Kühn-ül-Ahbar' (manuscript in the library of the Faculty of Letters in Ankara), p. 175 a; H. Inalcik, *loc. cit.*, pp. 79–80.

⁶ N. A. Smirnov, *op. cit.*, pp. 103, 117, 115.

⁷ P. A. Sadikov, *loc. cit.*, p. 141. The 'rechi' of Mal'tsev will be referred to as 'Mal'tsev's report' and the 'doneseniye' of Novosil'tsev as 'Novosil'tsev's report'.

⁸ A manuscript copy of the German version is in the Haus-, Hof-, und Staatsarchiv, Vienna, in Turcica, 1568–69. The German version published in Nuremberg is a bibliographical rarity. A copy exists in the Bayerische Staatsbibliothek under the reference 81/h. The title reads: KURZTE BESCHREYBUNGE DES WEGES GEN CONSTANTINOPEL

Astrakhan' expedition must therefore make use of Taranowski's account as well as of the Turkish chronicles and records, the reports of Mal'tsev and Novosil'tsev, and other relevant material such as the dispatches of the French and German envoys in Constantinople. Only in this way can an accurate and balanced picture of the expedition be pieced together.

II

The Ottoman empire reached the zenith of its power and prestige and enjoyed its golden period under Sulaiman the Magnificent from 1520 to 1566. During this period its energies centred on extending its authority westwards in the Mediterranean and south-east Europe and eastwards in Asia Minor and the Caucasus. In its westward push it took Rhodes and conquered much of Hungary, though it failed at Vienna in 1529 and at Malta in 1565. In its eastward push its forces captured Tabriz, Baghdad, and Van, occupied Azerbaidjan, and reached the shores of the Caspian.⁹ The main resistance to its continued western expansion came from the Habsburgs and the Knights of St John and to its eastward expansion from Persia with whom Sulaiman the Magnificent was at war three times. These wars against Persia were made more difficult and exhausting by the great distances involved and by the mountainous terrain in which many of the campaigns had to be waged, and in the end they caused much dissatisfaction and concern among the Turkish people.

While Ottoman policy was directed towards the Mediterranean, central Europe and Persia, the political situation in eastern Europe had begun to be transformed by the rise of Muscovite Russia at the end of the 15th century. The growth of Muscovy's power and influence owed much to the disintegration of the Golden Horde,¹⁰ which helped Ivan IV to capture Kazan' and annex the khanate of Kazan' in 1552. This brought the middle Volga under Moscow's control and opened the door to Russian penetration into Siberia and northern Turkestan. In 1556 Ivan IV proceeded to overthrow the khanate of Astrakhan' and

AUSS POLEN auch auss Constantinopel gen Astracam welches ein Muscowoterisch Schloss ist und ligt gegen Auffgang der Sonnen auff Persien zu darneben der zuge des Türckischen Krieguolcks welchen sie in anno 1569 gegen Astracam gethan wie sie umbkommen auch was ihnen und den Tatern im heimziehen begegnet. Cf. *Bibliografia Polska Karola Estreicher*, t. XXXI, edited by S. Estreicher, Cracow, 1936, p. 26: Taranowski, Andrzej; see also J. Pajewski, 'Projekt przymierza polsko-tureckiego za Zygmunta Augusta' (*Księgi pamiątkowej ku czci Oskara Haleckiego*, Warsaw, 1935). For a Polish version, see *Biblioteka Polska*, no. 9, edited by J. I. Kraszewski, Cracow, 1860. E. Humurzaki gives a short extract from the German version in *Documente privitoare la istoria românilor*, 19 vols, Bucharest, 1887-1922, II, pt. i, (1891), p. 595.

It will be referred to henceforward as 'Taranowski's report', and unless stated otherwise references will be to the German version in the Haus-, Hof-, und Staatsarchiv, Vienna.

⁹ J. von Hammer, *Geschichte des Osmanischen Reiches*, 4 vols, Pest, 1834-35, II (1834), pp. 303, 234.

¹⁰ See B. D. Grekov and A. Yakubovsky, *Zolotaya Orda i yeyo padeniye*, Moscow, 1950, p. 373.

establish Muscovite power in the Volga delta and on the north shore of the Caspian. This turned the Vagol into a Russian river throughout its course and enhanced its strategic and economic importance to the Muscovite state. From Astrakhan' Russian influence also began to spread along the shores of the Caspian towards the river Terek and the northern Caucasus. This meant that it approached a region over which Sulaiman the Magnificent had established Ottoman authority.

Hitherto the Ottoman government had hardly been directly involved in Muscovite affairs. It showed some commercial interest in Russia and sent special state merchants to buy furs for the sultan's palace. Russian merchants also brought goods such as furs and linen to Kaffa in the Crimea and to Azak (Azov) on the Don estuary which the Turks had taken from the Genoese in 1475. But the political and diplomatic relations between Constantinople and Moscow were conducted through the khans of the Crimea, though it is true that Moscow sent special envoys to Constantinople from time to time. There is thus no basis for saying either that after the failure to conquer Vienna in 1529 Turkish aggression was directed against Muscovite Russia¹¹ or that the Ottoman government had a 'northern policy' which contributed to the rise of Muscovite Russia.¹² It is equally wrong to affirm, as Soviet historians have often done, that the Porte tried to encroach on Russian territory by supporting or trying to establish a protectorate over the khanate of Kazan'.¹³ On the contrary, firm evidence is lacking that Turkey ever entered into regular relations with Kazan'. The truth is that during the first half of the 16th century the Porte took no specific steps to check the growth of Muscovite power and assumed that the khans of the Crimea would always be able to restrain the Muscovites by means of their cavalry. But the assumption proved false when Moscow formed regular forces and equipped them with fire-arms and particularly with cannon. The Crimean Tartar raiders often found themselves powerless to deal with these Muscovite cannon which were effective even against a fortified Tartar centre like Kazan'.

The main outpost of Ottoman power in the region closest to Muscovy's advance down the lower Volga was the stronghold of Azak at the mouth of the Don. Administratively Azak came under the governor of Kaffa in the southern Crimea. But as a garrison fortress it enjoyed a separate military status, and the janissaries and other forces which

¹¹ N. A. Smirnov, *op. cit.*, p. 88.

¹² H. Inalcik, *loc. cit.*: p. 51. 'In fact, after the conquest of Istanbul an active and uninterrupted policy against the North was started, and the expedition against Astrahan (sic) is nothing other than a concrete consequence of this policy, due to the new conditions.'; and p. 100: 'To come to a real understanding of the foundation and evolution of the Russian empire an intimate knowledge of the Northern policy of the Ottomans is necessary.'

¹³ See *Ocherki Istorii SSSR: period feodalizma, konets XV v.—nachalo XVII v.*, pod red. A. N. Nasonov etc., Moscow, 1955, pp. 352–55, and *Istoriya Tatarskoy ASSR*, pod red. N. I. Vorob'yov etc., vol. I, Kazan', 1955, p. 140.

manned it had their own *aghas* or commanders. It also had its own *kady* or judge. Azak was important commercially as well as militarily and strategically.¹⁴ The Don estuary abounded in fish, and Azak became a trading centre for fish and caviar, mostly for the Christian population of Constantinople, particularly during Lent. The nomads in the area also used it as a market for cattle and butter, and it even traded in timber which was brought from the upper Don by Russian Cossacks. Another flourishing branch of its trade was in slaves who were sold at Azak by Tartars, Circassians, and Cossacks and shipped to Kaffa and Constantinople in their hundreds and thousands. In general Azak was too remote and wild and too cold in winter to enjoy much of a reputation among the Turks. But some of the shrewder ones among them succeeded in making fortunes out of it and were ready to settle. Up to the middle of the 16th century Azak was left in relative peace and quiet, except for occasional forays by Circassians and Tartars. But it began to be faced with growing pressure from the Don Cossacks who established themselves as an independent community consisting mainly of fugitive Russian peasants with a sprinkling of fugitive Tartars. These Don Cossacks developed a para-military organisation similar to that of the Tartar Cossacks¹⁵ and began to raid Turkish territory on the lower Don. In 1559 they even tried to take Azak in conjunction with Dmitri Vishnevetsky, leader of the Dnieper Cossacks, who was in league with Ivan IV and had previously attacked the Crimea.¹⁶ At the same time certain Circassian tribes who were beginning to be influenced by the Russians rose against the Turks and made a successful surprise attack on the fortresses of Temrük and Taman' on the Caucasian shore of the Black Sea.¹⁷

Muscovite influence had already spread among the Nogais, a nomad Turkic people who had been left as a small remnant of the Golden Horde and were seriously weakened by internal conflicts.¹⁸ Yusuf Mirza, the head of the Nogai tribes, was opposed by Ismail Mirza, his younger brother, who sought support from Moscow. Eventually Yusuf Mirza was killed and Ismail Mirza triumphed. But many of the Nogais refused to recognise his authority and followed a certain Kady-Mirza instead.¹⁹ In 1557 and 1558 the Nogai horde suffered from a terrible famine in which 100,000 of them and many more of their cattle are

¹⁴ O[ttoman] A[rchives], Istanbul, Cadastre books, no. 214, Regulations on the customs revenue of Azak.

¹⁵ G. Stökl, *Die Entstehung des Kosakentums*, Munich, 1953, p. 145.

¹⁶ A. Refik, 'X asırda açık deniz meselesi ve Azak muhasarası' (*Tarih Encümeni Mecmuası*, no. 17, 1926, Istanbul, p. 261); S. M. Solov'yov, *Istoriya Rossii s drevneyshikh vremyon*, third edition, n.d., 29 vols, St Petersburg, VI, cols. 103–05.

¹⁷ E. N. Kusheva, 'Politika Russkogo gosudarstva na Severnom Kavkaze v 1552–1572 gg.' (*Istoricheskiye zapiski*, no. 34, Moscow, 1950, p. 262).

¹⁸ A. A. Novosel'sky, *Bor'ba Moskovskogo gosudarstva s Tatarami v XVII v.*, Moscow, 1948, pp. 13–15.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 15.

believed to have died of starvation.²⁰ The famine intensified their internal dissensions, and Kady-Mirza and his followers crossed to the right bank of the Volga and moved to the lower Kuban' into a region which was under the protection of Turkey and the Crimea. They were known as the Little Nogai horde to distinguish them from the rest of the Nogais under Tin-Muhammed Mirza who remained on the left bank of the Volga, between the Volga and the Ural rivers, and were known as the Great Nogai horde. The breach between the two groups continued, and as Tin-Muhammed Mirza recognised Moscow's authority the leaders of the Little Nogais began to incite the Turks and the Crimean Tartars against the Russian control of the lower Volga and particularly Astrakhan'. Here the Russians had abandoned the old Tartar city on the right bank of the Volga and had built a new fortress town on an island about 10 miles downstream²¹ inhabited by several hundred Russian families and a certain number of Cossacks. The fortress, which had walls of earth and wood, was garrisoned by *strel'tsy* and protected by cannon. A monastery was also established, and its abbot, who was sent from Moscow, was specially charged to convert the 'pagans' to Orthodoxy.²² But commercially Astrakhan' was still unimportant and was used only by a few Russian and Persian merchants.

After Ivan IV's conquest of Astrakhan' his influence began to extend to the peoples of the northern and eastern Caucasus who were in conflict with each other and were also involved in the continued struggle between Turkey and Persia. Even before the Russians took Astrakhan' certain Circassian chieftains had established friendly contacts with Moscow, to which they looked for encouragement against Turkish and Tartar pressure. In 1557-58 Temrük, the ruler of Kabarda, sent a special mission to Ivan IV to ask for Russian protection, and the tsar not only undertook to grant it but cemented his undertaking by marrying Temrük's daughter in 1561. Temrük also sent a son to Moscow where he was baptised and joined the *oprichniki*. In 1567 the Russians built a fortress on the Terek river to protect Kabarda from its neighbours and manned it with a garrison equipped with cannon.²³ This brought them into the immediate vicinity of Ottoman territory and seemed a threat to communications between the Ottoman outposts of Azak on the Don and Derbent on the Caspian.

Reasons for friction between Turkey and Muscovy were thus accumulating. Yagmurdju and Dervish-Ali, the last khans of Astrakhan', were living in Turkey with their suites of nobles, while many refugees from Kazan' and the Nogais had gone to the Crimea and to Azak. All

²⁰ A. Jenkinson, *Early Voyages and Travels to Russia and Persia*, 2 vols, London, 1886, I, pp. 49-50.

²¹ *Rossiia*, pod red. V. P. Semyonov, 19 vols, St Petersburg, 1899-1914, VI (1901), p. 538.

²² P. A. Sadikov, *loc. cit.*, p. 163, n. 36.

²³ E. N. Kusheva, *loc. cit.*, pp. 254-56, 262, 274-75, 277-79.

of them tried to influence feeling against Muscovy and urged the Crimean Tartars and the local Turks to expel the Russians from Astrakhan' and even Kazan'.²⁴ Some Nogai nobles sent letters to the sultan himself, complaining of Russian oppression of Moslems in Moscow's newly conquered territories and sometimes appealing to him to free them from the Russian yoke. Devletgerey, khan of the Crimea from 1551 to 1577, backed their complaints and appeals and tried to rouse the Porte to the dangers of Russian penetration into the north Caucasus. Calls to the sultan 'to open the way through Astrakhan' also came from the rulers of Turkestan. War between the Persians and the Uzbeks under Abdullah Khan had denied Turkestan merchants and pilgrims the Persian route to Mecca, and when they tried an alternative route through Astrakhan' and Azak the Russians refused to let them pass. This brought complaints from the Uzbek and Khiva khans who wrote to urge the sultan to put matters right.²⁵

It seems very likely that Sokollu Mehmed Pasha, the Turkish grand vizier, became interested in the problems of the Volga region and aimed to check Russian expansion in the north Caucasus. In 1563 certain people around him appear to have contemplated a campaign to eject the Russians from Astrakhan' and the lower Volga, and stories were also current that the Porte planned to cut a canal between the Don and the Volga which would make it possible for a Turkish flotilla to pass from the Sea of Azov to the Caspian.²⁶ In view of such Ottoman achievements as the construction of huge mosques in Constantinople and Adrianople and the plan to cut a canal at Suez,²⁷ the idea of a Don-Volga canal was not on the face of it considered to be impracticable and was talked about by officials of the Porte and others outside the government. But it was not based on adequate technical knowledge or on investigations into the topography of the region in question. Russian agents in the Crimea heard of the schemes mooted at the Porte and reported them to Moscow, while Devletgerey Khan, who had also learned of them, demanded that Ivan IV should restore both Astrakhan' and Kazan'.²⁸ But Moscow treated his demand as no more than a bid to secure more generous Russian payments to himself and his nobles. The really decisive factor proved to be the attitude of Sulaiman the Magnificent whose attention was centred on Malta, Cyprus, and Hungary, not on the lower Volga and the north Caucasus. The result was that his military preparations were all directed westwards and left no room for a campaign eastwards against Astrakhan'.

²⁴ S. M. Solov'yov, *op. cit.*, VI, cols. 214-18.

²⁵ See *Istoriya Uzbekskoy SSR.*, vol. I, pt. i, pod red. S. P. Tolstov, Tashkent, 1955, pp. 406-408; S. M. Solov'yov, *op. cit.*, VI, cols. 218-19.

²⁶ S. M. Solov'yov, *op. cit.*, VI, col. 214.

²⁷ O. A., Register book, no. 17.

²⁸ S. M. Solov'yov, *op. cit.*, VI, col. 217.

With Sulaiman's death and the accession of Selim II in 1566 the Turkish attitude changed radically. The grand vizier now revived the earlier idea of an expedition to Astrakhan' and found the new sultan much more favourable than Sulaiman had been. He believed that when completed it would enable Turkey to threaten Persia from the north and conquer the province of Shirwan.²⁹ It would also check Russian expansion into the north Caucasus, establish Turkish control over the 'important' trading centre of Astrakhan', and open the pilgrims' road to Mecca.³⁰ It might even lead to the liberation of Kazan' which could be placed under the khan of the Crimea. If possible a canal was to be cut between the Don and the Volga in order to enable Turkish warships, military stores and provisions to pass from the Black Sea into the Caspian.³¹ This would further help Turkey in her wars with the Persians. All these questions appear to have been discussed in the Turkish divan where certain 'arrogant' councillors opposed Sokollu Mehmed Pasha, particularly over the projected canal, the feasibility of which they denied.³² But the grand vizier received support outside the divan, especially from Kassym Bey, a high official in the Turkish treasury, who was a Circassian by origin.³³ Sokollu Mehmed Pasha instructed Kassym Bey to enquire into the possibility of cutting a canal between the Don and the Volga and to collect the necessary information for sending an expedition to Astrakhan'. The Turks in Azak had already learned, probably from the Tartars, that the Don Cossacks dragged their vessels between the Don and the Volga, and it seems likely that those who supplied Kassym Bey with topographical information about the region considered that a canal would be easy to dig. This made the project seem attractive to some of the Turkish dignitaries and persuaded them that it could be realised. Rumours about it became current in Constantinople and reached western Europe through the foreign envoys. They also spread to Moscow by way of the Crimea.³⁴

While the possibility of an expedition to Astrakhan' was still under consideration Hadji Muhammed, khan of Khiva, sent an envoy to Selim II in 1568 to complain that the Russians were hindering the passage of Moslem merchants and pilgrims who wished to go through

²⁹ Ali, 'Küh-ül-Ahbar', p. 174 b; E. Charrière, *Négociations de la France dans le Levant*, 4 vols, Paris, 1848-60, III (1853), p. 57, Letter of M. de Grantrie de Grandchamp to Charles IX, 14 March 1569.

³⁰ Letter from Selim II to Hadji Muhammed, khan of Khiva, O.A., Register book, no. 7, p. 985. It is printed in H. Inalcık, *loc. cit.*, p. 101.

³¹ E. Charrière, *op. cit.*, p. 57, Grandchamp to Charles IX, 14 March 1569; despatch from Albert von Wyss, Haus-, Hof-, und Staatsarchiv, Vienna, Turcica, 1568-69; also E. Humurzaki, *op. cit.*, II, pt. i, p. 588.

³² Ali, 'Küh-ül-Ahbar', p. 174 b.

³³ *Ibid.*, and Peçevi, *Tarihi*, I, p. 468.

³⁴ E. Charrière, *op. cit.*, pp. 57, 63, letters of Grandchamp to Charles IX. Also despatches of von Wyss and Stöckl in Haus-, Hof-, und Staatsarchiv, Vienna, Turcica, 1568-69, and P. A. Sadikov, *loc. cit.*, p. 148.

Astrakhan' on their way from Turkestan to Azak.³⁵ He again urged the sultan to 'open' Astrakhan', and his envoy may have given a deliberately exaggerated account of Astrakhan's revenue as a spur to Turkish action. Some of the nobles from the Great Nogai horde even promised to join and provision the Turkish forces if they undertook an expedition and reached Astrakhan'. Devletgerey Khan was also inclined to favour the project, though his attitude was by no means free from ambiguity. The upshot was that early in 1568 Selim II and the divan resolved to undertake a campaign against Astrakhan'. But their main energies were directed towards the conquest of Cyprus which was far more important to them than a small remote town at the mouth of the Volga.

Once the expedition had been decided on, preparations for it started on land and sea in the summer of 1568. Both the governor-general of Kaffa and the khan of the Crimea were expected to play an important part in it, and as Kassym Bey enjoyed the full confidence of the grand vizier he was made governor-general of Kaffa with the rank of pasha in the spring of 1568. In the months which followed the shipyards of Kaffa were busy with the construction of small vessels suitable for navigation on the Don, while gunpowder, provisions, digging tools, timber and planks were assembled for shipment to Azak from which the expedition was eventually to set out. Several thousand labourers and a few hundred carpenters, mostly from Moldavia and Wallachia, and guns, arms of all kinds, and ammunition from Constantinople also went to Kaffa.³⁶ The khan of the Crimea was considered by the Turks not to be enthusiastic about the expedition and to be pessimistic about the possibility of cutting a canal between the Don and the Volga. He had probably pointed out the difficulties which would arise from the desolate nature of the terrain and the scarcity of pasture and water, and he was certainly uneasy at any prospect of closer Turkish control over the Crimea. But the sultan's decision to mount the expedition left him with no other choice but to begin his preparations for joining it, and the Porte sent him the customary gifts, clothes, and money, and also bows and arrows but not fire-arms. At the same time the khan made use of the Turkish military preparations to remind Moscow in even stronger terms than before of his own claims to Astrakhan' and Kazan'.³⁷ Moscow itself was kept informed of the aims and preparations of the Turks through Afanasiy Nagoi, its envoy in the Crimea, who had bribed one of the influential Tartar nobles. It tried to buy off Devletgerey Khan with vague promises and fresh gifts for both himself and his advisers. But it also angled for an armed diversion by the Persians in the Caucasus and sent an envoy to the shah with an offer of cannon and arquebuses.³⁸

³⁵ See footnote 30.

³⁶ E. Charrière, *op. cit.*, p. 58, Grandchamp to Charles IX, 14 March 1569.

³⁷ S. M. Solov'yov, *op. cit.*, VI, cols. 217-18.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, col. 221 and P. A. Sadikov, *loc. cit.*, p. 157.

The Turkish preparations for the expedition were scheduled to be completed in March 1569. As it was to take place in a remote and uninhabited region big supplies of hard biscuit were commandeered in the Crimea and the towns along the Caucasian shore of the Black Sea. The sandjaks of Silistria, Nicopolis, and Kustendil in Rumelia and of Tchorum, Djanik, and Amasia in Anatolia had to provide the necessary troops who were ordered to assemble in Azak.³⁹ Those from Rumelia numbering some thousands of *sipahi* or cavalry were not allowed by the khan to go through the Crimea and had to march from the Danube to the Don across the Kipchak steppes.⁴⁰ Those from Anatolia went by sea from Sinop to Kaffa. A Turkish fleet of many galleys and smaller craft suitable for navigation in the Sea of Azov and on the Don also collected at Kaffa and reached Azak in June 1569. The oarsmen in the galleys, who were mostly prisoners of war, numbered between 2,500 and 3,000 and included about 150 Russian Cossacks and Semyon Mal'tsev who later wrote an account of the expedition.⁴¹ Among the Turkish troops were 3,000 janissaries⁴² who came by sea from Constantinople with ammunition and provisions. In all the Turkish forces were 15,000 strong and were expected to be supported by about 50,000 Crimean Tartars, Little Nogais, and Circassians. The total force of over 60,000 was meant to be sufficiently imposing to strike dismay into the Muscovites.⁴³ But it was small in comparison with the forces which the Turks deployed for their big campaigns in Hungary or against the Venetian islands in the Mediterranean.

Kassym Pasha, who was in command of the expedition, left Kaffa at the end of May 1569 and proceeded to Azak by land accompanied by the Turkish *sipahi*. Devletgery Khan set out from the Crimea with three of his sons and about 50,000 Tartars in the second half of June and reached Azak at the beginning of July, by which time the expeditionary force was ready to start. A fourth son of the khan was with the Nogais. It was apparently intended to conduct the expedition in two distinct stages. During the first stage a flotilla of Turkish ships carrying cannon, provisions and ammunition was to ascend the Don as far as 'Perevoloka'⁴⁴ where the Don approached closest to the Volga and the Cossacks took their small craft from one river to the other, in part overland. Here the Turkish ships and their cargoes were to be transferred from the Don to the Volga. When the possibility of a Turkish expedition to Astrakhan' was under consideration in 1563 the idea seems to have

³⁹ A. Refik, 'Bahr-i Hazer-Karadeniz kanali ve Ejderhan seferi' (*loc. cit.*, p. 9).

⁴⁰ Taranowski's report, pp. 8b-9a.

⁴¹ P. A. Sadikov, *loc. cit.*, p. 155.

⁴² According to Taranowski's report, p. 8. Also E. Charrière, *op. cit.*, p. 57, Grandchamp to Charles IX, 14 March 1569.

⁴³ Taranowski's report, p. 8a. It is impossible to be sure about the number of troops and auxiliaries taking part in the expedition as the various sources give different figures.

⁴⁴ A. Jenkinson, *op. cit.*, I, p. 55 and II, p. 443.

been to ascend the Don as far as the river Ilovlya and transfer from the Ilovlya to the river Cherepakha which flowed into the Volga.⁴⁵ But in 1569 it seems to have been intended to transfer the Turkish ships from the Don to the Volga to the south of the confluence of the Ilovlya with the Don. During the second stage of the campaign the Turkish flotilla was to sail down the Volga in the company of the Turkish and Tartar land forces for a joint assault on Astrakhan' supported by the cannon transported in the Turkish ships.

The Turkish flotilla started its ascent of the Don from Azak about 10 July. By this time of the year the Don was so shallow in places that the flotilla made slow progress, and the cannon and some of the stores had to be unloaded and transported overland. Kassym Pasha with the Turkish forces and Devletgerey Khan with the Tartars followed the flotilla which reached 'Perevoloka' on 15 August.⁴⁶ Novosil'tsev's report says that the flotilla ascended the Don as far as the river Tsaritsyn, which is probably a tributary of the Don later known as the river Tsaritsa.⁴⁷ Here it had apparently been intended to dig the projected canal between the Don and the Volga. But as the ground was hilly and the two rivers were about forty miles apart,⁴⁸ Kassym Pasha and his lieutenants realised that the topographical information which had been given to the Turks was highly inaccurate and that any idea of a canal was out of the question. Instead they decided to haul some of the ships by land,⁴⁹ and Kassym Pasha ordered that work should start on leveling the ground with pick and shovel and laying down planks and timber. Thousands of men and horses laboured at this task for fifteen days under the protection of the Turkish troops and their Tartar auxiliaries who remained on the alert for possible attacks by Don Cossacks and Muscovite forces. But as the Cossacks had already withdrawn in face of the Turkish advance and as there were no Muscovite forces in the vicinity, the Turkish preparations were not molested. Some of the Turkish ships were pulled ashore and mounted on wheels. But after half a day's hard work the wheels broke down when the ships had been hauled only a few hundred yards.⁵⁰ This showed that the enterprise was hardly more practicable than the cutting of a canal, and Kassym Pasha decided to abandon it and send the flotilla back to Azak with all the cannon and other supplies except for about a dozen light field pieces. The return voyage to Azak took five weeks and was nearly as

⁴⁵ S. M. Solov'yov, *op. cit.*, VI, col. 214.

⁴⁶ Mal'tsev's report, P. A. Sadikov, *loc. cit.*, p. 155. Dates are given in the old style.

⁴⁷ Novosil'tsev's report, P. A. Sadikov, *loc. cit.*, p. 164.

⁴⁸ Taranowski's report, p. 9b: 'Veritable grosse meilen auff baiden seitten'.

⁴⁹ Mal'tsev's report, P. A. Sadikov, *loc. cit.*, p. 145: '... pytalis' kopat' i katargi volochiti...'; Taranowski's report, p. 9b: 'haben sie ihre waltzen genommen auff welchen sie die Gallen mit dem was darauff gewesen ober den berg waltzen und zu land hetten fortbringen sollen'.

⁵⁰ Novosil'tsev's report, P. A. Sadikov, *loc. cit.*, p. 165: '... a podelav voloki i kolesa, poshli proch ot beregu k Volge. A shli, dei, polovinu dni; i stali sya u nikh voloki i kolesa portiti...'.

full of hazards as the ascent of the Don. In particular, the Don Cossacks, who were encouraged by the Turkish retreat, followed the flotilla in their small boats and made several unsuccessful attempts to attack the Turkish galleys.⁵¹ The complete failure of the first stage of the expedition reveals how inaccurate are the Turkish chronicles and the historians who have followed them when they assert that 'one-third of the distance between the Don and the Volga rivers was dug in three months'.⁵² The truth is that the expedition stayed at 'Perevoloka' no more than a fortnight and that no part of the projected canal was dug at all.

News of the Turkish expedition had been received in Moscow with great concern. Since 1558 Ivan IV had been engaged in a costly attempt to conquer Livonia which involved him in war with Poland-Lithuania and compelled him to deploy all his available forces in the west. It is true that an armistice had been made in 1567. But it was not very secure and hostilities were liable to be resumed at any moment. The result was that Ivan IV could send only a small force under Prince Serebryany to move down the Volga in defence of Astrakhan'.⁵³ Equally important, Moscow's efforts to induce the Persians to make a diversion against Turkey remained unavailing. The Turkish expedition had also excited the peoples living near the Sea of Azov and in the north Caucasus. The Little Nogais under Kady-Mirza were more than ready to co-operate with the Turks against the Russians, and several thousands of them set out to join the Turkish forces in the neighbourhood of Astrakhan'. Even some of the Great Nogais favoured the Turkish expedition, and Tin-Muhammed Mirza, their leader, made contact with the Turks in spite of his pro-Russian sympathies. But the prospects of active aid from the Great Nogais were uncertain and problematical. Some of the Circassian chiefs, whom the Porte had ordered to join the expedition,⁵⁴ probably gave it their backing. But most of them seem to have remained inactive and taken no part in it.

Kassym Pasha's chances of taking Astrakhan' were considerably reduced when he failed to move his ships, cannon, and supplies from the Don to the Volga and had to send them back to Azak. The Turks had counted on their cannon to be able to shell the fortress from both land and water, and they could have used their flotilla to stop the movement of Russian men and supplies into Astrakhan' along the Volga. Kassym Pasha had also wasted nearly two months of the best season of the year on the unsuccessful first stage of the expedition and

⁵¹ Taranowski's report, p. 10a.

⁵² Ali, 'Kühn-ül-Ahbar', p. 175a; Peçevi, *Tarihi*, I, 469; A. Refik, 'Bahr-i hazer-karadenie kanali ve Ejderhan seferi' (*loc. cit.*, p. 10); H. Inalcık, *loc. cit.*, pp. 79–80: 'After two months of intensive work one third of the canal was finished.'

⁵³ N. M. Karamzin, *Istoriya Gosudarstva Rossiyskogo*, 11 vols, St Petersburg, 1818–24, IX (1821), pt. 1, p. 130.

⁵⁴ O.A., Register book, no. 7, p. 819, no. 2246. Printed in H. Inalcık, *loc. cit.*, p. 103.

was already faced with the approach of autumn. But he still remained confident of success. Some of his land forces had already moved from Azak to Astrakhan' by a southern route along the river Manyč, and on their way they had been joined by Kady-Mirza and a force of Little Nogais. They reached the old site of Astrakhan' on 5 September but decided not to start operations until the arrival of the main Turkish force under Kassym Pasha.⁵⁵ Even earlier a small Nogai detachment had gone to 'Perevoloka' to urge Kassym Pasha not to delay his advance on Astrakhan'. They offered him food and other supplies and also said that ships would be made available for him on the Volga. Kassym Pasha was so pleased and encouraged by their promises that he gave them rich presents in return and began to move his forces south towards Astrakhan', accompanied by Devletgerey Khan and the Crimean Tartars.⁵⁶ He seems to have expected an easy victory and presumably believed that the Nogais and Tartars round Astrakhan' would help him and that the Russians might surrender without a fight. Otherwise it is hard to understand how a man of his experience could have decided to advance on Astrakhan' so late in the campaigning season.

Kassym Pasha and his men followed the right bank of the Volga across the sand-steppes and reached the ruins of the old town of Astrakhan' on 16 September.⁵⁷ The new Russian settlement was some 10 miles to the south on a big island off the left bank of the Volga. The fortress was surrounded by walls of earth and wood and was not very strongly defended.⁵⁸ But it was protected against any land attack by the wide and deep waters of the river. For the first time in history an Ottoman Turkish force took up positions on the Volga, or Itil as it is called in Turkish sources, and prepared to attack a Russian garrison. In numbers the odds were heavily on their side even though advanced detachments of Prince Serebryany's troops had reached Astrakhan' on 12 September.⁵⁹ The rest were moving in groups along the lower Volga and spreading rumours that big Russian forces were assembling to attack the expedition. Fortunately for the Russian garrison Kassym Pasha's forces were ill-equipped for a successful assault on Astrakhan'. They disposed of only two big guns and 30 small guns,⁶⁰ and even their big guns had too short a range to be able to bombard the Russian fortress. They were also short of provisions; the weather was beginning to turn cold; the Little Nogais failed to provide the food and other supplies which they had promised Kassym Pasha at 'Perevoloka'; and no more than a few hundred Great Nogais came out openly against the Russians and joined the Turkish and Tartar forces.⁶¹

⁵⁵ Taranowski's report, p. 106. ⁵⁶ Mal'tsev's report, P. A. Sadikov, *loc. cit.*, p. 155.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 156. ⁵⁸ A. Jenkinson, *op. cit.*, I, pp. 56-9. ⁵⁹ Taranowski's report, p. 11a.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 8b: '30 Falkenetein und zwo Mauerbrecher'. The khan of the Crimea also had ten small guns.

⁶¹ Mal'tsev's report, P. A. Sadikov, *loc. cit.*, p. 156.

The Turkish craftsmen in the expedition repaired some of the buildings in the old town of Astrakhan' which were used to house officers and men. It is also likely that they built wooden barracks for the same purpose. The Turkish gunners tried to bombard the Russian fortress with their field pieces. But their fire proved ineffective and did no more than set fire to a few houses outside the walls. Kassym Pasha next tried to blow up the fortress by using Turkish sappers and miners, who had so often shown their skill during the wars in Hungary. But the width and depth of the surrounding waters made even this impossible. As the Turks were without ships they were also unable to prevent Prince Serebryany from entering Astrakhan' with reinforcements and ammunition for the Russian garrison. The result was that the Turks found themselves in an increasingly difficult position, and that Kassym Pasha was obliged to revise his plans. He seems to have thought of wintering in the old town of Astrakhan'⁶² and resuming his attack in the spring of 1570 when he hoped to have succeeded in bringing up heavy cannon. But neither the Crimean Tartars nor his own troops were willing to stay on in view of the length and severity of the Astrakhan' winter and the uncertainty about food supplies for the men and fodder for the horses.⁶³ It thus became clear that the expedition would have to abandon the campaign against Astrakhan' and return to Azak as quickly as possible. The Turks began to withdraw on 26 September,⁶⁴ destroying and burning their barracks and other buildings before they left. Their retreat was certainly not due to pressure from the Russian forces who had remained on the defensive and never engaged the Turks in a serious encounter. What really caused them to leave Astrakhan' was the approach of winter⁶⁵ and the growing shortage of provisions and supplies.

The return of the Turkish forces from Astrakhan' to Azak across sandy wastes with neither food nor water is well described by Andrzej Taranowski who joined the expedition about forty miles west of Astrakhan'.⁶⁶ The distance from Astrakhan' to Azak was nearly 500 miles, and it took the Turks 27 days of marching before they were able to reach Azak on 23 October.⁶⁷ Their sufferings on the way were terrible. The Turkish soldiers and horses died in their hundreds of hunger and thirst, and only a relatively small number arrived at Azak unscathed. By contrast losses were insignificant among the Crimean and Nogai Tartars who were inured to the hardships of this kind of march and

⁶² Mal'tsev's report, p. 156.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, p. 156.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 157; Taranowski's report, p. 11b.

⁶⁵ E. Charrière, *op. cit.*, p. 83, Grandchamp to Charles IX, 16 October 1569: '... et me semble advis jusques à present que le temps les a plus combattuz que non pas l'ennemys...'.
⁶⁶ Mal'tsev's report, P. A. Sadikov, *loc. cit.*, p. 157: '... litovskoy gonets Ondrey Taranovskoy...'.
⁶⁷ Taranowski's report, p. 20b.

avoided hunger and thirst by eating horse flesh and drinking mare's milk. It was said that Devletgerey Khan deliberately led the Turks along the desolate route followed in order to produce a disaster which would cure the Porte of any desire to repeat the expedition to Astrakhan'. How far the accusation was justified it is impossible to determine. But it should be said in the khan's defence that no shorter and better route existed, and that it was probably the Little Nogais and not the Crimean Tartars who acted as guides. Even when Kassym Pasha was back in Azak his troubles were by no means over. At the end of September fire in one of the houses had spread to the magazines of the fortress which were full of powder, some of it brought back in the flotilla which had returned to Azak from 'Perevoloka'. This caused a terrific explosion which killed many of the troops in the fortress and destroyed a large part of the walls.⁶⁸ A month later, on 27 October, the Sea of Azov was swept by a great storm which wrecked many Turkish ships laden with troops and provisions.⁶⁹ This added considerably to the expedition's losses in both men and material.

Kassym Pashastill hoped to launch a second expedition against Astrakhan' in the spring of 1570.⁷⁰ He believed that Azak had sufficient arms and stores to make this possible, and he wrote to Constantinople to seek the necessary authorisation. But the Porte was now absorbed in preparations for the conquest of Cyprus and showed no interest in a second attack on Astrakhan'. It had also begun to reap some benefits from its first unsuccessful attack. Under the pretext of congratulating Selim II on his accession to the throne in 1566 Ivan IV had sent Novosil'tsev to Constantinople with a letter to the sultan expressing his desire to live in peace and friendship with him. It is true that the letter clearly showed the tsar's determination to keep possession of Kazan' and Astrakhan'.⁷¹ But its general tone was conciliatory and seemed to offer the prospects of compromise. The Porte on its side was inclined to re-establish good relations with Moscow provided that Ivan IV was ready to accept its conditions. These were that he should destroy the Russian stronghold on the river Terek, officially renounce his support for Kabarda, open the road through Astrakhan' for Moslem pilgrims and merchants, and satisfy Devletgerey Khan's claims to tribute. The tsar proved amenable to these terms, and in April 1571 he sent another special envoy to Constantinople with a letter to Selim II accepting them.⁷² The result was that the Russians abandoned their fortress on the Terek in 1571 or 1572,⁷³ which meant that even if the Astrakhan'

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 10; E. Charrière, *op. cit.*, p. 83, Grandchamp to Charles IX, 16 October 1569.

⁶⁹ Taranowski's report, p. 20b.

⁷⁰ Mal'tsev's report, P. A. Sadikov, *loc. cit.*, p. 158.

⁷¹ N. A. Smirnov, *op. cit.*, I, p. 118.

⁷² *Ibid.*, p. 122.

⁷³ E. N. Kusheva, *loc. cit.*, p. 286.

expedition failed to achieve its major objective it had at least checked Russian expansion in the north Caucasus. It had also left Moscow uneasy about Turkey's future intentions towards Astrakhan' and Kazan'.

The whole progress of the expedition had been followed with considerable interest by western representatives in Constantinople such as the French ambassador, Grantrie de Grandchamp, the Venetian envoy, Antonio Barbaro, the German ambassador, Albert von Wyss, and the German chargé d'affaires, Anselm Stöckel. They all reported the Turkish preparations for the campaign and the scheme for making a canal between the Don and the Volga, and when the expedition ended in failure they made no attempt to conceal their satisfaction in their despatches home.⁷⁴ During his visit to Constantinople in 1570 Novosil'tsev learned that the Turkish setback had soon become known abroad and that people in western Europe 'rejoiced' at Turkey's failure to capture Astrakhan' and had begun to say 'the Muscovite ruler is great and who can withstand him'.⁷⁵ The publication of Taranowski's account of the expedition in German in Nuremberg in 1571 'to this Muscovite castle of Astrakhan' which is situated in the direction of the sunrise near Persia' also helped to bring the Turkish failure to the notice of many more people in Germany and Austria and particularly Vienna.⁷⁶ A few years later Maciej Strykowski, a friend of Taranowski, incorporated extracts from it into his 'Polish Chronicle' under the heading 'The defeat of the Turks by the Muscovites'.⁷⁷ This general feeling of satisfaction at the Turkish setback was hardly surprising when it is remembered that the 'Turkish danger' was still at its height for Venice, Poland, and Germany. But in 1571 it was more than offset by Turkey's conquest of Cyprus from the Venetians.

Even Muscovy did not enjoy its supposed victory for long. In the spring of 1571 Devletgerrey Khan and 120,000 Crimean Tartars made a great raid into Russia which reached as far north as Moscow itself.⁷⁸ Ivan IV, who 'doubted his nobilitie and chiefe Captaines of a meaning to betray him to the Tartar',⁷⁹ left the capital and fled to Rostov. The Tartars set fire to the outskirts of the city and the flames engulfed the whole of Moscow, except the Kremlin, and burned a great many of its inhabitants to death. Prince Bel'sky, who had been charged with the defence of the city, died of suffocation in the cellar of his palace. It is also said that the Tartars caused the death of Dr. Arnolph Linsey, the tsar's physician, and twenty-five merchants from London. Devletgerrey

⁷⁴ E. Charrière, *op. cit.*, p. 83, Grandchamp to Charles IX, 16 October 1569.

⁷⁵ N. A. Smirnov, *op. cit.*, I, p. 117.

⁷⁶ See footnote 8.

⁷⁷ *Kronika Polska, Litewska*, Sanok, 1856, II, 1173-92.

⁷⁸ N. M. Karamzin, *op. cit.*, IX, pt. 2, note 355, p. 118.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, note 353, p. 118.

Khan watched the conflagration from the Sparrow hills outside the city and no doubt felt that it more than redeemed the failure of the expedition to Astrakhan' two years before.⁸⁰

Compared with the considerable and sustained Ottoman efforts in the Mediterranean, the Danube valley, North Africa, Asia Minor, and Mesopotamia, the expedition to Astrakhan' is of minor importance in Turkish history and resembles a play with neither beginning nor end. The truth is that the Porte hardly considered Astrakhan' to be within the range of Ottoman interests proper, and after Kassym Pasha's failure to take it in 1569 the Turks made no attempt to strike at Astrakhan' again. For Moscow, on the other hand, the Astrakhan' campaign represented another act in the 'drama' of the struggle for mastery of the Volga, and as such its importance is undeniable. If the Turks had taken Astrakhan' in 1569 they would undoubtedly have dealt Moscow a really serious blow, and from this point of view it is significant that Ivan IV and his successor were careful to avoid any further clashes with the Ottoman empire until the middle of the 17th century.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 116-17.